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Content Editor

U.S. Army and Navy Forces Collaborate with African Partners in the Fight against Malaria

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Story from NAMRU-3 Public Affairs

ACCRA, Ghana - The Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center (KAIPTC), hosted a malaria diagnostics training course over the summer in support of the continuing East and West Africa Malaria Task Force (EWAMTF), efforts to assist African military partners in expanding their malaria programs.

The two-week course focused on improving the diagnostic capabilities involved in detecting malaria. The course was the result of the ongoing collaborative efforts of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), U.S. Army Medical Research Division- Kenya (USAMRD-K), U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit No. 3 (NAMRU-3), EWAMTF, with the support and cooperation from the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research (NMIMR), and the Ghana Armed Forces 37 Military Hospital.

Malaria microscopy continues to be considered the “gold standard” for detecting malaria.

Thirty-nine military health professionals from Benin, Burkino Faso, Core D’Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and Ghana, participated in hands-on training that included clinical presentation of malaria, identification of low density infections, parasite detection and species formation, parasite counting techniques, and malaria rapid diagnostic tests.

The facilitation of the courses combined the joint efforts of Ghana Armed Forces, NMIMR, USAMRD-K and NAMRU-3 personnel and the KAIPTIC.

“In order to increase the sustainability of the program, we are incorporating more of our local partners in leading and facilitating the training,” said Navy Lt. Joseph DiClaro, Deputy Officer in Charge of the NAMRU-3 Ghana Detachment and technical lead for EWAMTF Malaria training.

EWAMTF was created in 2011 by AFRICOM to bring scientists and policy makers together to better enable resource sharing, strategies and expertise in malaria programs. The malaria microscopy diagnostic training was synchronized with the Key Leadership Event (KLE), in order to provide East and West African military health teams the opportunity to come together and identify the strategic vision for the EWAMTF.

“Having the KLE to coincide with the training demonstrates to our partners’ leadership the tactical level events that AFRICOM offers to the malaria task force,” said Army Maj. Antonio Leonardi AFRICOM’s EWAMTF lead.

“The totality of holding the KLE at the same time as the training session is to assist the participants when they return to their country to have support from their leadership to make a direct impact to their malaria programs,” added Leonardi.

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During the KLE, leaders observed live training sessions and saw the skill sets their teams are building. “It’s important for the leadership and policy makers to get an example of the tactical training that’s being conducted to assist in the success of the EWAMTF and their own malaria programs,” said Leonardi.

The KLE participants concluded their conference by presenting graduation certificates to the Diagnostic training course attendees.

“The Army/Navy research team has provided strong technical support to the malaria task force over the years and this has provided academic tools for our African partners to carry back and increase their force health protection by directly supporting the fight against malaria,” said Navy Capt. John Gilstad, NAMRU-3 Commanding Officer.

A second malaria diagnostic training was held at USAMRD-K Malaria Diagnostic Center (MDC) in Kisumu, Kenya. In attendance were 14 participants from Djibouti, Kenya, Burundi, Tanzania, and South Sudan. The MDC serves many regional projects as a malaria microscopy reference laboratory and validation center as well as a microscopy teaching laboratory.

Besides NAMRU-3 and USAMRD-K, the Kenya Defense Force provided a lecture and discussion about the impact of malaria on African Forces which highlighted the historical impact of forces stationed in the sub region.

“This year NAMRU-3 and USAMRD-K worked with other partners to standardize the training curriculum for the malaria diagnostic training which led to successful graduation of 33 students from 16 countries. The pre and post exams conducted for both training opportunities reflected an improvement of 35-45 percent increase in the class’s mean scores,” said Army Capt. Thomas Gilbreath, Chief for USAMRD-K MDC.

This joint team is now working with AFRICOM to plan the 2017 malaria diagnostic training in Ghana at the KAIPKTC and operational entomology training at USAMRD-K in Kenya.

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